

Introduction

If you picked up this book, you're probably a sicko. You'd probably love to see Santa sneaking up on a kid with a blood-soaked bag and a sharpened candy cane. You're thinking about it right now and grinning, aren't you? Don't worry, I don't think there's anything wrong with that, because I'm a sicko too. Bring on that killer Santa, I say, and let's see what's in his dripping bag.

Now don't get me wrong, Christmas is a wonderful holiday full of cheer and joy, and I sincerely enjoy those aspects of the season, but the thing is, there's room in my heart for the nice *and* the naughty, and I don't think I'm alone in that.

Roasting chestnuts on an open fire is great, but so is nuking a gremlin in the microwave. And watching your child's face light up when she opens a gift she's been hoping for all year is heartwarming, but that doesn't mean you can't also appreciate her scream when she reaches into her stocking and finds a clump of fur and animal bones, right?

Several years ago, while snapping together the pieces of a LEGO advent calendar, I had a thought: *I should make something like this...except, you know, in book form.*

The idea fermented for a long time. Every year when Christmas rolled around, I'd think about it again and tell myself I should give it a go, but by the time I got the chance to sit down and actually do some work, the holiday was over and my focus had moved on to other things.

Last year, I decided that if I didn't start the project soon, it might never happen, so I buckled down and wrote the first story. Never mind that it was already time to take down the tree. Never mind that spring was right around the corner and I'd soon forget the smell of eggnog and the feel of snowflakes on my face. I wrote the story. Then I wrote another. And another. I started with maybe half a dozen ideas and a fear that my imagination would give out on me halfway through, but the stories kept coming, and before I knew it, I had two dozen, one for every day of December leading up to the big finale.

I wanted to keep the stories short. Something even someone who doesn't normally read every day could keep up with. A fun way to start each morning or unwind after work. Oddly enough, the stories all ended up almost exactly the same length (give or take a few hundred words), and this happened with little to no coaxing on my part. For me, it turns out, five pages just happens to be the sweet spot for this type of thing. Is it a Christmas miracle? You could call it that, and I wouldn't argue with you.

But in addition to the short stories, I also wanted to do something more substantial, so for those of you who enjoy the stories, there's something extra waiting at the end. And if you're the type of person who doesn't enjoy

shorter stories—a monster, in other words—you could always skip right to the 25th. I can't stop you. But I do hope at least some of you will read this collection as intended and that it will bring some extra fun to your holiday season. Merry Christmas, you sicko.